

The Inter-Religious League, Chittoor

OBJECTS

To study reverently, by means of lectures and study circles, the basic teachings of all the living religions of the world with special reference to their ideas of God and Soul, Life, Death and Immortality, Faith, Knowledge and Works as means to Salvation, relations between Man and God, Man and Man, Man and Woman, Believer and Unbeliever, Rich and Poor, and this world and the next, and Man's destiny here below.

RELIGION AND RECONSTRUCTION

BY

C. JINARĀJADĀSA, M.A. (CANTAB.)

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RELIGION AND RECONSTRUCTION

MANY years ago I read a poem on the subject of God, which made an impression upon me because it described so very graphically what happens when people of varying faiths discuss certain fundamental problems of life. The poem is this:

WHAT FOUR MEN SAID

They sat and they talked where the cross-roads meet,
Four men from the four winds come ;
And they talked of the horse, for they loved the theme,
And never a man was dumb.
The man from the North loved the strength of the horse,
And the man from the East his pace,
And the man from the South loved the speed of the horse,
And the man from the West his grace.

So these four men, from the four winds come,
Each paused a while in his course,
And smiled in the face of his fellow-man,
And lovingly talked of the horse.
Then these men parted and went their ways,
As their different courses ran ;
And each man journeyed with peace in his heart,
And loving his fellow-man.

They met next year where the cross-roads meet,
Four men from the four winds come ;
And it chanced, as they met, that they talked of God,
And never a man was dumb.
One imaged God in the shape of man,
A spirit, did one insist ;
One said that Nature herself was God,
One said that He didn't exist.

But they lashed each other with tongues that stung,
That smote as with a rod ;
Each glared in the face of his fellow-man,
And wrathfully talked of God.

And then they parted and went their ways,
 As their different courses ran,
 And each man journeyed with war in his heart,
 And hating his fellow-man.

S. W. Foss

Happily this condition of things shows signs of change. It is quite true that we can still find groups of people who are rigid in their orthodoxy, and will not admit that there is any of God's Light except in their own little Temple. The change towards the larger viewpoint is due mainly to Comparative Religion.

This phrase means many things, but in the main it represents two movements. The first gathers records of civilizations past and present, and particularly of the conditions among savage tribes; it then tabulates them all, with somewhat of a desire to show that all that we term "Religion" is little more than the refinements which we have made upon primitive superstitions.

The second mode of studying Comparative Religion is to bring together all that is inspiring in the various religious traditions, and attempt to correlate them and show them as in some way a slow filtering down into human consciousness of certain fundamental facts of a Spiritual Realm. A poem of Edwin Arnold, narrating a Sūfi story, describes the attitude of the second type of comparative religionist, who believes in God and Brotherhood.

"Tis told, nigh to a city-gate
 Four fellow-travellers hungry sate,
 An Arab, Persian, Turk, and Greek;
 And one was chosen forth, to seek
 Their evening meal, with dirhems thrown
 Into a common scrip; but none
 Could with his fellows there agree
 What meat therewith should purchased be.
 "Buy *uzum*," quoth the Turk, "which food
 Is cheaper, sweeter, or so good?"
 "Not so," the Arab cried, "I say
 Buy *aneb*, and the most ye may."

"Name not thy trash!" the Persian said,
 "Who knoweth *uzum* or *aneb*?
 Bring *anghur*, for the country's store
 Is ripe and rich." The Greek, who bore
 Their dirhems, clamoured, "What ill thing
 Is *anghur*? Surely I will bring
Staphylion green, *staphylion* black,
 And a fair meal we shall not lack."
 Thus wrangled they, and set to try
 With blows what provend he should buy,
 When, lo! before their eyes did pass,
 Laden with grapes, a gardener's ass.
 Sprang to his feet each man, and showed
 With eager hand, that purple load.
 "See *uzum*!" said the Turk; and "See
Anghur!" the Persian; "what should be
 Better?" "Nay, *aneb*! *aneb* 'tis!"
 The Arab cried. The Greek said, "This
 Is my *staphylion*!" Then they bought
 Their grapes in peace.

Hence ye be taught!

It is this desire to go behind names and to see the
 fundamental Reality in all things which your Organization,
The Inter-Religious League, embodies. In a larger field,
 it is also the primary work of The Theosophical Society.
 As one who has had much to do with the Theosophical
 Society, I am of course in perfect sympathy with the aims
 of your League, and am heartily glad I can give a little aid
 in a work which is so vital for us all who live in India
 to-day.

The need of us all, men and women of good-will, to
 "get together" is indeed very great, because there is to-day
 a definite trend away from the spiritual standpoint towards
 all the world's affairs which is designated by the term
 "Religion". This challenge to Religion began several
 generations ago with the advance of modern science, for
 science seemed to prove that the universe was nothing but a
 mechanical process, and that any conception of God, or of a
 soul that survives bodily death, was untenable in the light of
 the facts of science. Happily there are signs of a change, due

to the work of men like Jeans, Eddington and Lodge, in England, Millikan in the United States, and a few others who represent a more cautious attitude to the problem of Religion.

A second, and in some ways a more vital challenge to-day, is due to the subtle change which has come over the spirit of Youth since the Great War. There is much justification in Youth holding the older generations and their creeds responsible for the holocaust which was offered up at the altar of Nationalism in the Great War. It is indeed a hopeful sign of the future that Youth is impatient of old conditions. In this action of theirs, they are of course only carrying on the propaganda which some of us idealists have attempted for long years. Such destructive criticism and action are very necessary, because the old fabric of civilization is indeed moth-eaten and requires thorough overhauling. But blended with this admirable desire for change, there is also a movement of complete rebellion against any law or tradition which restricts the individual in his attempt to express himself completely, regardless of the welfare of the Community of which he is part. As Religion is one of the greatest law-makers on behalf of the Community, Youth has tended to throw to the winds many a tradition, considering all such as nothing more than old wives' fables.

We have all frankly to admit that at the moment we are living in a wrecked world. The economic collapse everywhere is only one indication how for generations the Nations of the world have had false aims and ideals. The helplessness of organized Religion in the face of this crisis was most graphically described on August 14th last by the Bishop of Ripon, in the closing words of his sermon commemorating the founding of Fountains Abbey 800 years ago. "Our generation has all that Fountains had in its later days—unequalled resources, equipment, organization, business ability, knowledge of affairs. But it has lost faith and inspiration, and so it has

neither power nor joy. The very will to good is paralysed, and over the future lies a pall of fear." What he says with regard to his own religion is true of every other. Yet we must have Religion as the foundation of the world which it is our duty to reconstruct. It is quite true that just now in Russia they are attempting to create a Utopia completely eliminating every religious sentiment. Whether they will produce a Utopia or merely a Pan-demonium remains to be seen. But at any rate we, who are gathered here to-day, have as our common faith that Religion should be the basis of a reconstructed world.

On the other hand, we must not shut our eyes to the fact that some of the worst evils in the world are still being bolstered up in the name of religion. We know here in India how, when the British Government began to abolish Sati, the orthodox Hindus considered such action as uprooting the landmarks of Hinduism, and quoted Vedic and other texts in support. At this actual moment, when those who have the sense of humanity awake in them, and feel the tragedy of little Indian girls, are striving to stamp out child marriage, at just this very moment in South India we have public meetings of the orthodox to protest against the Sarda Act, which imposes penalties on all—parents, bridegroom, priest, relations, who arrange or officiate at the marriage of a girl under fourteen—as contrary to Hinduism. It is well known that in the United States, when first the agitation began against Slavery, there were many who upheld it as a divine institution and quoted the Bible in support. I have myself had to argue with those who objected to Vegetarianism, on the ground that Jehovah in the *Old Testament* instituted flesh-eating with the verse: "Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the greenherb have I given you all things." (*Genesis*, ix, 3.) While we unite together to make Religion the foundation of civic and national life, we

must clearly recognise that there are certain elements in the religion of each of us which have to be ruthlessly eliminated.

I have said that we need Religion for reconstruction. The problem at once arises: Which Religion? Here I think the answer is perfectly clear. The only religion which will aid us in reconstruction is the religion which is *lived* by us, that is to say, not the religion which we profess with our lips or with ceremonial actions, nor even the religion in which we intellectually believe, but the religion which is actually *lived by us* and so is in reality the only religion that we know.

In order to make my thought clearer, let me put it in this way: I think without exaggeration or injustice we may say that each one of us, whether Hindu, Christian, Muhammadan or Buddhist, has two forms of his religion. For instance, the Hindu has one form of religion crystallized into the wearing of caste-marks, performance of various Pūjas, of sacrificial ceremonies, of Nitya and Naimittika Karmas. But the really spiritual Hindu lives by a far more profound religion, which is that of the *Gītā*:

He who offereth to Me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit, water, that I accept from the striving self, offered as it is with devotion.

In exactly the same way, the Christian has his religion of daily prayers and church-going, which becomes often somewhat mechanical. But there is that other religion which in many ways gives far more the spirit of the Christ:

Forasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.

In Islam there is one religion, that of prayers five times a day, but there is the second religion which is to be found in the words of the Prophet:

Whoso easeth his brother of one of the troubles of this troublous world, Allah shall relieve him of seventy and two troubles on the Day of Resurrection.

Speaking for my own religion of Buddhism, there is the usual religion of the masses of going to the Temple to offer flowers and to listen to preachings, but the second and truer religion of the Buddha is contained in the following words:

All the means in this life, ye monks, to acquire religious merit have not the value of a sixteenth part of Love, the liberation of the mind.

To produce Love in one's mind for a single moment is a more commendable deed than to distribute among the poor thrice a day a hundred pots of food.

It is a striking fact that when we describe the religion which we profess or subscribe to with ceremonies, we are apt to be divided from our fellowmen of another faith. Arguments and disputes instantly spring up when we compare our religion with the religion of another. On the other hand, when we come to discuss with another the religion which we *live*, and the religion which he *lives*, that is, the real religion of the heart, there is instantly union between us. Furthermore, one of the most wonderful facts of the spiritual world is that the religion which a man *lives* calls out from all with whom he comes into contact more of the religion which they are attempting to *live*. Deep calls unto deep, and the flame in my heart mysteriously evokes a larger light in the flame of everyone around me.

I take it that all of you are united with me in our fundamental thesis that reconstruction—municipal, national and international—should have Religion as its basis. But I hold that the reconstruction of which we are dreaming can never be brought about with the aid of the ideals of one religion alone. I hold that we need to-day, in order to evoke a World Conscience and a World Order, elements from every religion in the world. Thus we need from Hinduism its mystical idea of Yajna or Sacrifice, which teaches that there is an invisible World Order in which Devas

or Angels are co-operating, and that men must commune with them by Yajnas, so that both Devas and men may carry out the Plan of God. There is necessary from Buddhism the doctrine of Anatta or No-Soul, which teaches the individual not to exaggerate his personality so as to make it the centre of the world, but rather to try to live a life of noble conduct, upholding a World Order in which the survival of his personal individuality is not a necessary factor. From Christianity we need the gospel of Self-sacrifice, summed up in the words of the Christ, "Love thy neighbour as thyself". From Islam we need its main teaching: "The Will of Allah be done." So throughout, with one religion after another. All these revelations of the Spiritual World are necessary to-day in order to build the new World Order.

As we go forth to build the new world, I do not think it at all matters what is the name which we give to our Ideal, or in whose Name we serve. Many of us will call that ideal God. We shall differ as to the names which we give to the God of our worship. Some of us may go as far as Matthew Arnold did, when he named the God of his worship, "a power not ourselves which maketh for righteousness". In many ways I feel inclined, when asked what is my religion, to quote Goethe's lines: "*You ask me what religion I profess? None of those you mention. Why none? From sense of Religion.*"

There is one new element in religion which I consider as very necessary to-day in our attempts at world reconstruction. It is that type of spiritual verity which is being given us by the youngest of the teachers, Krishnamurti. There are two of his sayings which stand out like aphorisms which not only shed light, but give a deep inspiration of power to all social workers. I will only quote to you these two which have given me much light indeed. I remember at one of his discourses the few words: "*Behaviour is Righteousness.*"

Like a flash of lightning that reveals what is enveloped in darkness, I began to see how our old conception of Dharma or Religion must be changed, and that religious Dharma is not a matter of mere observance of ceremonial rules or of prayers, but of how we speak to our fellowmen, what criticisms we make of them, those personal habits which reveal whether we are selfish or selfless—those simple things of daily action which unfortunately have been dissociated from religion, and labelled as belonging to a “secular” world, as distinct from a “religious” world.

The second aphorism is far more profound and revolutionary. It is: “*The Individual Problem is the World Problem.*” For we idealists are apt to lose ourselves in dreams of world reconstruction, and forget that there is an intimate relation between the world of our character and the larger world of every one else’s character. We do not realize that glossing over our faults and excusing our failures, because we have ideals, devitalizes our Idealism itself. If only every reformer realized that the most effective world reform begins with the reformation of himself, then, when all of us pool our Idealisms together, we shall move the whole world though we are few in number.

In conclusion, as indicating the line of my own Idealism, I should like to read to you three extracts which sum up much of my thinking and action. The first, strangely enough, is what an American said. He is the socialist Debs, who passed away in 1926. He was not representative of the highest culture of the United States, for he was a workman, but he had a great ideal, and in living for it I forget how many times he was sent to gaol by the constituted authorities of the land. His ideal is in these words:

While there is a poorer class, I am of it; while there is a criminal class, I belong to it; while there is a soul in gaol, I am not free.

The second is an exquisite poem, and I do not know who is its author. It is full of the noblest Christian Idealism, and is as follows :

Rune of Hospitality

I saw a Stranger yestreen,
I put food in the Eating place,
Drink in the Drinking place,
Music in the Listening place :
And in the Sacred Name of the Triune,
He blessed myself and my house,
My cattle and my dear ones.

And the lark said in her song :
Often . . . Often . . . Often,
Goes the Christ in the Stranger's Guise,
Often . . . Often . . . Often,
Goes the Christ in the Stranger's Guise.

And lastly, I think that in most ways the real religion of my heart is represented by the following lines of George MacDonald, which I quote constantly in my lectures :

O God of mountains, stars and boundless spaces,
O God of freedom and of joyous hearts,
When Thy face looketh forth from all men's faces,
There will be room enough in crowded marts ;
Brood Thou around me, and the noise is o'er,
Thy universe my closet with shut door.

Friends, we have communed together, though I have been the speaker and you the listeners. But truly, where men meet together, whether for the sake of God or of man, there is not only a unity of all here below, but also a unification with One above. It is that profound mystery which Christ revealed when He said : "*Where two or three are gathered together in My Name there am I in the midst of them.*" It little matters what we call Him Who is invisible. For myself, I discover Him most readily when I look at the faces of my fellowmen.

C. JINARĀJADĀSA

Chittoor, Madras Presidency,

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